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BETWEEN CLASSICISM AND MODERNITY: ERIC ROHMER ON URBAN CHANGE

Abstract

A director at the crossroads of the arts, Éric Rohmer took a keen interest in the urban transformations France underwent in the course of the twentieth century, in particular the post-war *villes nouvelles* project launched by the Gaullist government in 1965. In a programmatic article on the relationship between cinema and architecture, followed by a series of television documentaries from the 1960s and '70s as well as two features – *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* (1984) and *L'Ami de mon amie* (1987) – the director interrogates the new types of urban living proposed by progressive architects and town planners. Focusing on the intersection between his theoretical writings, his little-known documentaries, and his fictional work, this article assesses Rohmer's ambivalent attitude towards modern architecture in the wider context of the tension between classicism and modernity evidenced in his aesthetics and creative practice. As cautious of the functional modernism of a Le Corbusier as he is of postmodern housing schemes, the director offers a probing reflection on the relationship between the built environment and lived experience, framed by a broader questioning of cinema's place among its more established sister arts.

La forme d'une ville

Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel.¹

Like André Bazin, Éric Rohmer has thought extensively about the relationship between film and the other arts, devoting some of his most penetrating articles to the

specificity, means of expression and evolution of different media as well as their potentials for mutual dialogue. In a series of articles first published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1955, later to be collected in book form as *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*,² the fledgling director not only makes a fervent case for cinema's equality with its older sister arts; he polemically declares the new medium's pre-eminence over its more established and prestigious siblings – literature, painting, music, and architecture. Rejecting the widely held belief that cinema is still in its infancy, Rohmer forcefully argues that, in mid-century, whilst other art forms have progressively moved towards abstraction or become increasingly self-reflexive, solely cinema, through the privileged relation it entertains with reality, is still capable of apprehending and capturing life in all that it habitually withholds from the grip of art.³ Cinema's status as a mechanical art does in no way restrain its aspiration towards beauty and truth, two interlinked values Rohmer considers as the ultimate goal of artistic expression. Where the other arts have turned away from nature, film takes on a quasi-redemptive role in reconnecting spectators with the spiritual and ontological dimensions of human existence. No longer taunted as a newcomer, it is henceforth in a position to evaluate its older siblings' evolution and to judge their current state of play.

Architecture, the first art in Hegel's monumental *Aesthetic* and the one which, together with theatre, is often considered as closest to cinema,⁴ receives an ambivalent treatment in the last essay, ominously entitled 'Architecture d'Apocalypse'. Though accepting modern architecture's potential for creating a world made to the measure of our pleasure and our thirst for freedom, Rohmer cautions against the isolation and loss of genuine experience twentieth-century city dwellers incur in the soulless habitations of urban modernity. The battle between the classical and the modern that the critic fights in this programmatic text is continued 'in the field' through a series of

television films Rohmer directed for the French educational channel RTS after stepping down as the main editor of *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1963. A lyrical documentary, *Métamorphoses du paysage* (1964) traces the radical refashioning of our environment in the wake of the industrial revolution, sensitizing the audience (that is, secondary school students) to the ‘difficult beauty’ afforded by industrial architecture. *Entretien sur le béton* (1969), composed of interviews with the architect Claude Parent and the cultural theorist-cum-urbanist Paul Virilio, evaluates the expressive possibilities of reinforced concrete against the backdrop of widespread public hostility towards brutalist architecture. The television film *Le Celluloïd et le marbre* (1965) inverts the perspective of the eponymous theoretical manifesto: here it is practitioners of the other arts who are called upon to provide a perspective on cinema, through an assessment of their relationship with the new medium as well as of its capacity to respond to the needs of modern citizens. Finally, in a series of four television documentaries broadcast by TF1 in 1975, Rohmer draws a complex portrait of the *villes nouvelles* – that is, the rigorously planned new cities decided upon by the Gaullist government in 1965 to alleviate the demographic pressures of the post-war period in major centres like Paris. As is more generally the case with his television films, the expertise he gathered together with his accrued sensitivity towards questions of urbanism, architectural modernity and their effect on city dwellers had a shaping influence on his fictional work of the following decades, most importantly *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* (1984) and *L’Ami de mon amie* (1987), set in the new towns of Marne-la-Vallée and Cergy-Pontoise respectively.⁵

Rohmer’s engagement with urbanism and keen interest in architecture have been addressed in a number of studies, ranging from the intertwining of industry, nature, and art in two of his educational documentaries,⁶ to the portrayal of the *villes*

nouvelles as places of alienation and dislocation emblematic of late modernity,⁷ and, more specifically, the female experience of urban environments.⁸ The representation of the city in Rohmer's films more generally has been the focus of several compelling investigations that testify to Rohmer's sensitivity to the ways in which urban space affects its inhabitants.⁹ The director's treatment of architecture and the built environment has furthermore been the subject of a series of enlightening interviews.¹⁰ The fact that, until recently, Rohmer's television documentaries were not available in DVD (they were compiled in a box set in 2012)¹¹ and that his early articles on cinema's relations to the other arts had not been reedited has meant that most studies to date have concentrated on Rohmer's features, at the expense of his documentaries and critical essays. Yet, to fully apprehend the complexity (and, indeed, ambiguity) of Rohmer's relation to modern architecture and urbanism it is necessary to engage with all the forms of this rich oeuvre, be they written or cinematic, documentary or fictional. My purpose in this article is to elucidate the interface between theory, documentary, and fiction in Rohmer's reflection on urban change. As a creative laboratory, the little known television films allowed Rohmer to experiment with themes, ideas, and cinematic techniques in a relatively unconstrained context. Likewise, in his theoretical writings, the director first aired aesthetic principles and conjectures that were later going to be incorporated into the filmic fictions. Examining the intersection between his essays, documentaries, and features offers a privileged vantage point from which to assess Rohmer's ambivalent views on architectural modernity in the context of the wider tension between classicism and modernity that underpins his aesthetic reflection and creative practice. What is more, the relationship between architecture and film that emerges in these works affords us a deeper understanding of the resolutely intermedial thinking and cinematic practice

of a director whose love for cinema, as Noël Herpe and Philippe Fauvel comment, ‘se nourrissait d’une fréquentation constante des autres arts.’¹²

Order and formlessness: Métamorphoses du paysage

What kind of beauty is there to be found in industrial landscapes or, rather, how can an alert and curious gaze re-inject poetry into rural and urban sites ravaged by industrialization? This is the ambitious topic Rohmer set himself for one of his first pedagogical films, intended, in his own words, not as an argument for or against the past or the present; nor indeed as a material trace of the profound changes our built environment has undergone in the course of the last one hundred and fifty years or so; but, rather, as an invitation ‘de trouver dans cette métamorphose l’occasion d’une méditation et d’une rêverie poétique’.¹³ For a director who hitherto had exercised his art predominantly in the feature genre – in addition to *Le Signe du lion* (1959) he had authored a number of shorts, including the sketch *Place de l’Étoile* (1965) for the Nouvelle Vague anthology *Paris vu par...* as well as a first television film, *La Vie de société au XVIII^e siècle. Les Cabinets de physique* (1964) – the commission presented an opportunity to explore the poetic and philosophical capacities of the filmic medium in a particularly challenging context: the viscous, grimy underbelly of modernity. To appreciate Rohmer’s strategy in this little-known filmic gem, it is useful to refer to the third essay of the ‘Le Celluloïd et le marbre’ series, ‘De la métaphore’, which compares modern poetry (understood in the traditional sense of both poetry and prose) and the cinema. In a world governed by cause and effect relations where results are valued higher than processes of becoming, Rohmer argues, poetry has abdicated the use of figurative language – in particular metaphor – that once was its privileged domain. If modern poetry, increasingly turned towards abstraction, can no longer

reveal the universal laws that are enshrined in metaphoric expression, by contrast, the cinema, last-born among the arts, has become the sole refuge of the poetic.¹⁴ It is this double premise of the poetic potential of cinematic form and its singular capacity to capture the real that Rohmer takes as his starting point in *Métamorphoses du paysage*. More than a mere pedagogic exercise (remarkably demanding for a student audience), the film doubles up as a filmic manifesto harking back to Alexandre Astruc's seminal article 'La Caméra stylo' (1948), which first proclaimed cinema's status as a 'thinking' art no longer overshadowed by literature.¹⁵ In the tradition of the poetic documentary pioneered by Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), it invites a subjective interpretation of the documented reality.

The voice-over (spoken by Pierre Gavarry) sets out on a simple observation: what we habitually consider as bucolic or poetic is not intrinsic to an object, but the result of cultural – notably literary – conditioning. The windmill, poetic companion of our childhood fables, is no less a functional machine than the modern excavator. Nature and machines are not opposed in any ontological sense: man-made, the machine is shaped in our image; human and non-human in equal measure, it has become an integral part of nature. Confronting traditional notions of the natural and the artificial, beauty and ugliness, *Métamorphoses du paysage* challenges spectators' aesthetic sensibility, opening their eyes to the paradoxical beauty of industrial landscapes, which, at first view, may appear formless, unfinished or chaotic. Taking us from the mining towns and industrial ports of the North to the Parisian *banlieue*, and, eventually, the capital's Northern and Eastern quarters with their rich industrial patrimony, the camera tracks the manifold traces and imprints left by the industrial age. In the course of the film, two semantic fields – one revolving around monstrosity, the amorphous, malady, and internment; the other dwelling on idealist notions such as

grace, harmony, and order – intersect in a sustained exercise of trans-valuation. The maligned eyesores and waste products of modernity, as is suggested by repeated shot compositions where the sight of traditional buildings is obstructed by fences, barbed wire or telegraph poles, appear to stranglehold our environment; yet industrial architecture and machinery, valorized by close-ups, rhythmical editing and unusual camera angles, also reveal their inherent beauty and lyricism, in stark tension with the compromised landscapes they inhabit.¹⁶

‘Toute poésie est métaphore’, the voice-over declares about halfway through the film, naming the trope that henceforth is called upon to poeticize a world ‘qui porte la marque [...] moins de la joie créatrice de l’homme que de sa sueur et de sa peine, qui [...] évoque plus aisément la ruine du passé que l’édification de l’avenir’.¹⁷ Rohmer does not have recourse to the parallel editing, which, in the tradition of the Russian montageurs, remains a privileged means of translating metaphor into cinematic language. Instead, voice-over, sound, and above all, an expressive use of framing, lighting, composition, and editing perform the spell whereby the ordinary and the ugly are metamorphosed into curious sites of beauty. Touched by the magic wand of the cinema, cement mixers morph into towers and flourmills into enchanted palaces in an increasingly fantastical sequence on the *Porte de Pantin* building site. Seen with the fresh eye of a camera sensitive to the lines, textures, and rhythms of industrial modernity, the shafts of cranes and telegraph poles take on a weightless elegance. The oxymoronic welding of opposites effected by the voice-over accompanied by aestheticizing camera angles, soft lighting, and rhythmical editing reconcile nature and culture, the industrial and the artisanal, pre-Modernity and modernity, into one common project of human labour. From the origins of our civic communities, Rohmer reminds us, our environment has been subject to perpetual

change, a transformation that is merely accelerated – albeit leaving more visible traces – by industrialization. Rather than a threatening rupture in the history of humanity, the industrial age and its aftermath thus constitute a continuum in human evolution, just as industrial architecture develops and recycles the language of forms of its civic and domestic predecessors. Though Rohmer's main literary reference in the film, as in the 'De la métaphore' article, is Balzac – evoked in an allusion to Rastignac's famous 'A nous deux maintenant' from *Le Père Goriot* – it is another author from the director's literary pantheon, Marcel Proust, whose presence resonates in this poetic rereading of industrial landscapes. Metaphor, in the famous theorization of *Le Temps retrouvé*, by bringing together a quality shared by two things, becomes a privileged tool for extracting common essences and for bridging past and present. Similar to Elstir's marine paintings, which alerted the Narrator to metaphor's power to alter our habitual perception of the world,¹⁸ Rohmer seems to suggest, cinema, as a metaphoric art, allows us to re-enchant the environment we inhabit. As a trope based on analogy, the director elaborated in 'De la métaphore', metaphor unravels the hidden harmony between the human, vegetal and mineral spheres.¹⁹

Were it not for its aestheticizing style and the overtly humanist approach that characterizes Rohmer's thinking about cinema and the other arts, it would be tempting to align *Métamorphoses du paysage* with the work of the German photographers Bernd and Hilda Becher who, since the late 1950s, had embarked on a project to record Europe's industrial architecture, threatened by decay.²⁰ Rohmer's nostalgia for an architectural patrimony about to disappear – articulated in the last sequences of the film – in a different medium recalls the melancholic gaze the two photographers cast on industrial sites slated for demolition. Yet, where the Bechers – committed to a de-historicizing approach which puts the architectural object at the centre of their art –

cut out human presence altogether, for Rohmer architecture can have no aesthetic status except in its intrinsic, indeed anthropomorphic, relationship to the human: machines and industrial sites are ‘faite[s] par l’homme et, un tout petit peu à son image’; they enter into osmosis, ‘chacune empruntant des traits à l’autre’.²¹ As he reiterates in ‘Architecture d’Apocalypse’ and a follow-up interview with Noël Herpe and Philippe Fauvel of 2009, if architecture qualifies as an art form in as much as it satisfies our love for beauty, contrary to painting, sculpture or music, it is above all an applied art in the service of humanity.²² Insofar as their creations change the world we inhabit, architects are faced with greater moral obligations and constraints than, for instance, painters who can give free rein to their creativity.

For all its lyricism, Rohmer’s poeticization of the ugly in *Métamorphoses du paysage* is not devoid of irony,²³ tangible in the hyperbolic tone, clashes between sound and image tracks, and, not least, this cautioning reference to Plato’s cave – commonly seen as a pre-figuration of film – which alerts spectators to what Deleuze has termed cinema’s ‘powers of the false’²⁴:

Nous sommes nos propres montreurs d’ombres, tournant le dos au réel,
coincés dans la caverne de nos imaginations. Que d’objets n’avons-nous pas,
en même pas que nous apprenions à les nommer, dotés des plus mystérieux
pouvoirs, parés presque à notre insu, de la plus haute dignité poétique.²⁵

If the poetic valorization of France’s industrial heritage is thus steeped in ambivalence, future processes of modernization are apprehended with equal uncertainty. Resonating with Baudelaire’s famous requiem for the ‘vieux Paris’, demolished by Baron Haussmann’s urbanization projects of the Second Empire, in

‘Le Cygne’, the film’s final sequences lament the impending destruction of the city’s nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrial structures. The last shots of identical tower blocks symmetrically aligned behind one another belie the guarded optimism of the voice-over. Despite its griminess, the monotonous images suggest, the architecture of the industrial period – fashioned in the image of humanity – engages our imagination, unlike the rationalist habitations of the nuclear age, which are little conducive to reverie. Rohmer was by no means the only filmmaker to thus join the debates about architectural modernization that mobilized citizens, architects and town planners in the post-war period. A few years earlier, Jacques Tati had satirized the gradual substitution of the ramshackle *Paris populaire* by a nightmarish world of aseptic efficiency in *Mon Oncle* (1958), soon to be followed by *Playtime* (1967), his ambitious parody of a sterile, cold modernity. The concluding reflections of *Métamorphoses du paysage* also recall Chris Marker’s interrogation of the new forms of (sub)urban living in *Le Joli Mai* (1963), where architects and urbanists debate various models for social housing, while anticipating Jacques Rivette’s *Pont du Nord* (1980), which, some fifteen years later, was to document the demolition of Paris’s industrial heritage in a paranoid, surreal *film noir*.²⁶ Given the constraints of his commission, Rohmer’s critique of functionalist architecture remains subtly implied in this documentary. Some forty years on, in the already mentioned interview with Herpe and Fauvel, the director expresses a more candid opinion: ‘je ne pense pas qu’on arrivera jamais à trouver de la poésie dans ces grands ensembles qu’on appelait les HLM, et qu’on appelle maintenant les “cités”.’²⁷

New materials, new towns

In 'Architecture d'Apocalypse', Rohmer proclaimed his faith in the new building materials of architectural modernity, while also admitting that, contrary to the dressed stones and wood of earlier periods, the cement, glass, and panoply of plastic materials used in twentieth-century construction afford a more 'difficult' kind of beauty.²⁸ A second television film on the theme of modern architecture, *Entretien sur le béton* (1969), allowed him to dwell further on the aesthetic potential, but also the possible shortcomings of the most widely-used material of modernity in an extended interview (conducted by Louis Paul Letonturier and François Loyer) with two of its most fervent advocates, Claude Parent and Paul Virilio. At first, this traditional expository documentary seems far removed from the poetic mode of *Métamorphoses du paysage*, yet the alleged beauty of a material commonly associated with aseptic, soulless buildings is no less exalted by the two practitioners than were the charms of industrial architecture by the voice-over in the earlier offering. With hindsight, even for the most passionate defender of modern architecture, it is difficult not to detect a degree of *mauvaise foi* in Parent and Virilio's insistence on the plasticity and tactility of concrete structures, which they deem superior to the light, transparent aesthetic of a Mies van der Rohe. Whilst for most of the film, the image track remains neutral, showing the fabrication of concrete structures or showcasing some iconic concrete buildings, the forbidding final images of the Normandy bunkers that have inspired Parent and Virilio, combined with the former's own admission of the public's hostility to the material, put a question mark over the type of functionalist architecture the two practitioners present as a solution for post-war overcrowding. As in the previous documentary, the authorial stance – inasmuch as it is able to express itself given the constraints of the commission – is steeped in ambiguity: the somber images of World War II bunkers, rendered even more hostile by a zoom that reveals their rugged

surface, belie the vision of a tactile architecture in the service of human experience drawn up by the two urbanists.

The film *Le Cellulöid et le marbre* (1966), which includes interviews with the architect Georges Candilis as well as Parent and Virilio, and, a few years later, *Entretien sur le béton* had brought the director in close contact with some of the foremost architects and town planners of the period. Though hostile to Le Corbusier's radical modernism as well as to tower blocks more generally,²⁹ Rohmer took a keen interest in the *villes nouvelles*, that is, the fully planned, large-scale communities at the periphery of big cities voted by the Gaullist government in 1965 to relieve demographic growth. In an interview with Thierry Jousse and Thierry Paquot, the director explains his advocacy of the new cities in the wider context of conservation issues:

Je ne suis pas seulement passéiste. Je crois que tant que l'on ne propose pas une architecture convaincante, il faut garder soigneusement ce qui existe et construire ailleurs. C'est pourquoi j'étais pour des villes modernes, bâties à côté des villes anciennes et j'ai soutenu le projet d'un 'Paris parallèle' au début des années 1960.³⁰

Two filmic projects, *Architectopolis* and *Architecture présente*, destined to showcase the world of tomorrow currently created by architects and town planners, did not come to fruition.³¹ Rohmer did however bring his documentary work on modern architecture and city planning to a close with the already mentioned television series dedicated to the *villes nouvelles*. The first film, *Enfance d'une ville*, focuses on the construction of Cergy-Pontoise, one of the new cities at the outskirts of Paris, from its

inception to its – unfinished – state in 1975. The second, *La Diversité du paysage urbain*, presents the theories of a little-known group of architects and urbanists, the Atelier de recherches et d'études d'aménagement (AREA), who sought to overcome the uniformity of rationalist architecture with more diverse architectural forms recycled from the past. *La Forme d'une ville* – incidentally a title taken up by Julien Gracq for his portrait of Nantes – showcases the projects of the Atelier d'urbanisme et d'architecture (AUA), a group characterized by its opposition to urban fragmentation and promotion of a more coherent urban fabric. The film centers notably on the new town of Grenoble-Echirolles planned by AUA and their (rejected) submission for the new city of Évry. Finally, *Le Logement à la demande* follows a middle-class couple on the various steps of planning a fully modularized family flat.

Based essentially on interviews with urban planners and architects and, to a lesser extent, with the present and future inhabitants of the new cities, taken together, the four films offer a fascinating portrait of the architectonic and socio-political rationale behind some of the most ambitious spatial planning projects post-war. Each film is preceded by a didactic introduction followed by an enquiry *in situ*. The choice of lesser-known architectural studios and promoters of alternative aesthetic visions allows for a discursive diversity in what may otherwise have appeared like a uniform urban landscape. Not content with simply letting town planners and architects present the merits, challenges and potential pitfalls of their projects, Rohmer and his colleague Jean-Paul Pigeat – a journalist and trained urbanist – subject their documentary subjects to probing questions as to the aesthetic validity and user-friendliness of their creations. The effectiveness of architectural and urban theories is furthermore tested in dialogue with a limited selection of inhabitants – all exclusively white and seemingly middle-class – who share their experience of life in the new

cities. Though no voice is given to the immigrant workers who were instrumental in the construction of the new towns and make up a significant part of their diverse population, in the course of these exchanges, the *villes nouvelles* are apprehended as possible sites of ethnic and religious encounters, as gendered spaces that offer new forms of interaction for working women and for mothers, as well as loci of uprooting and re-anchoring: as one of the town planners of Cergy-Pontoise, using an unfortunate colonial analogy for the *villes nouvelles* project, explains, a large proportion of the new city dwellers are former settlers from the Maghreb. Through dialogue with practitioners and users, the crucial question of how the new forms of urban living proposed by progressive architects are received by their inhabitants is aired and the impracticality of certain ideas, such as the flat assembled by its owners, brought to light. Between the theoretical concepts of town planners and the practical needs and demands of modern city dwellers emerges a wider philosophical reflection on urban change dwelling on questions of beauty, functionality, conservatism, and modernity. If cities have always been subject to transformation, the radical difference between the traditional city and the *ville nouvelle*, one of the architects of the AREA group explains, is one of time and memory. With its palimpsest of architectonic and historical layers, the traditional city contains time. Its temporal stratification informs what, at first glance, appears like a solely spatial entity. The new city, by contrast, is not diachronic, but synchronic. Without memory traces, it is a blank slate, an artefact of the pure present, which town planners must endow with a system of references that mimics the process of passing of time found in traditional cities. The main philosophical problem of the new city, then, is its lack of memory resulting in a problem of readability and paucity of signification.

Rohmer's biographers Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, in an excellent chapter entitled 'Rohmer des villes et Rohmer des champs', dwell on the seemingly paradoxical passion the director, who adamantly criticized what he calls the 'geste totalitaire' of some of the twentieth century's greatest architects and opposed controversial modern projects such as Ieoh Ming Pei's Louvre pyramid, harboured for the radical urbanistic developments that were taking shape at the outskirts of France's major cities. Rohmer's notes in conjunction with the *villes nouvelles* series articulate a moderate, user-based attitude that also shines through in his television work, while also outlining the cinema's possible contribution to the necessary questioning of architectural innovation:

L'expérimentation ne doit pas passer par la construction de morceaux de bravoure. Les œuvres sont réussies si elles sont intégrées dans une conception d'ensemble et le quotidien des habitants. [...] La pensée architecturale doit se mettre en question et c'est difficile, mais le cinéma porte un discours sur l'espace de la ville.³²

Synchronic versus diachronic cities

Up to the 1980s, Paris, together with historic cities such as Clermont-Ferrand and Le Mans and filmic excursions to the Côte d'Azur and the Lac d'Annecy, had held centre stage in Rohmer's cinematic topography. Shorts like the *La Boulangère de Monceau* (1962), *La Carrière de Suzanne* (1963), the semi-documentary *Nadja à Paris* (1964) and the sketch *Place de l'Étoile* (1965) as well as the features *Le Signe du lion* (1959), *L'Amour l'après-midi* (1972) and *La Femme de l'aviateur* (1980) evince the director's interest in the social and cultural geography of the capital, apprehended as a

place of encounters and secrets, and above all, as the proverbial city of lovers conjugated in new variations of the classical love triangle. A master of intimacy, Rohmer maps onto the city space what, with Giuliana Bruno, one could call ‘an atlas of emotions’ – or, indeed, of ‘(e)motions’ – in view of the geographic form of an urban *flânerie* that the pursuit of affects, and the discovery of self and others, assumes in his films. As Thomas Clerc remarks, ever a disciple of Balzac, Rohmer at first opposes Paris and *la province*. In the wake of the massive urban change instigated by the town planning projects of the 1960s and ’70s, this classical opposition is displaced into a new paradigm, which confronts Paris and the new cities.³³ The margins become more attractive, whilst the center loses some of its appeal.³⁴ Sensitized to the theoretical concepts and practical realities of modern urbanism through his documentary work and through extensive dialogue and even site visits with architects such as Paul Chemetov from the AUA group, some ten years on, the director was ready to stage life and love in the *villes nouvelles* in his diptych *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* and *L’Ami de mon amie* from the *Comédie et proverbes* series. Informed by some of the overarching concerns of Rohmer’s oeuvre such as humanity’s quest for a spiritual center – an endeavor shown to be increasingly impeded by the fragmentation of postmodern living – the two films also pay particular attention to individuals’ (especially the female protagonists’s) affective responses to and negotiations of the city space.

Les Nuits de la pleine lune, one of Rohmer’s most successful films and a coruscating social portrait of the liberal 1980s, opens with a pan of a suburban scene. The camera slowly tracks the RER station (with a departing train), a street crossing with cars, a block of new habitations visible in the depth of field, and, finally, a line of identical postmodern houses. After briefly lingering on the door of one of them in a

perfectly symmetrical shot, with a lateral tilt it slowly moves up towards the roof, pausing on a window. With its foregrounded camera movement, slow pace and bleak scenery this incipit more resembles a Chantal Akerman documentary than a typical Rohmerian fiction.³⁵ From the outset, architecture and the (sub)urban space, more than simple settings, are established as characters of the filmic diegesis, worthy of the same attention as the protagonists who inhabit them. Seemingly austere, but no less interesting from an aesthetic point of view, as Rohmer explains, the built environment ‘pass[e] une épreuve, comme les personnes; l’épreuve de la photogénie.’³⁶

Throughout the film, once again strongly reminiscent of Akerman’s trademark style, the camera often lingers on the urban space or on a corner of a flat after the characters have already moved off screen, endowing architecture and the lived environment with a strong presence in its own right. A recurrent shot taken from the inside of the flat towards the main door, soon to be opened by its tenants or their visitors, privileges the permanent architectonic space over its impermanent inhabitants. In his careful *mise en scène* of both exterior and interior spaces, combined with the systematic crisscrossing between Paris and Marne-la-Vallée – motivated by the nomadic Louise (Pascal Ogier), who shares a flat with boyfriend Rémi (Tchéky Karyo) in the new city, but works and keeps a pied-à-terre in Paris – Rohmer pursues the interrogations from his television series: in fictional mode, *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* returns to the question of time in the city, comparing the diachronic city *par excellence* that is Paris with the synchronic space of the *ville nouvelle*.

Even in 1984, when the film was made, Marne-la-Vallée, one of the flagship new cities, remained largely under construction. The shots of un-built plots of land, with cranes and construction sites visible in the depth of field, remind us that this is a city still in the making, without a history or an identity of its own. In sharp opposition

to the barrenness of the *ville nouvelle*, which appears all the more desolate in the bleak winter light, the first images of Paris celebrate the proverbial *ville des lumières* as a palimpsestic site of memory and a vibrant city of culture, commerce, and entertainment. The equestrian statue of Louis XIV in the centre of the Place des Victoires, where Louise alights on her journey from the suburbs, inscribes the city in the tradition of the *Grand siècle*, one of its architecturally most distinguished periods and the emblem of French classicism. Shots of busy market stalls and animated streets contrast with the deserted roads of the suburbs, bringing home a town planner's comment from *Enfance d'une ville* that the concentration of activity into artificial zones brings with it the desertification of residential areas. Yet it is above all through the interior decoration that Rohmer posits the historicity of metropolitan culture against the novelty of the *ville nouvelle*.³⁷ Louise's workplace in a design studio located in the historical 2^e arrondissement, near the Bibliothèque nationale and the Palais-Royal, exudes eighteenth-century grandeur with its high ceilings decorated with gilded moldings, Versailles-style parquet floors and Murano chandeliers. Likewise, Louise's journalist friend Octave's (Fabrice Luchini) flat, though less sumptuous, is a treasure trove full of paintings, sculptures, photos of historic cities, and books – a fitting abode for an intellectual and his musician wife. By contrast, the town planner Rémi's home in Marne-la-Vallée, with its functional furniture, predominantly grey colour scheme, and strict geometrical lines reflected in the Mondrian posters in his sitting room-cum-study is testimony to the rational, 'no frills' spirit of modernity embodied in the new cities. Where the Paris homes are decorated with originals, here the sober walls are adorned with reproductions. Finally, Louise – an interloper between the two worlds – combines the ancient with the modern in her pied-à-terre in a historical townhouse furnished with design-style fittings and self-

made lamps and artworks (decorated by Pascale Ogier herself with objects from trendy designers, the flat becomes an embodiment of ‘chic’ urban living).³⁸ The two painted columns that frame her bed playfully inscribe the past in her habitat whilst, at the same time, denoting the 1980s as the height of post-modernity with its taste for pastiche and eclectic recycling of historical forms. Ironically, the column as a motif of temporal layering also appears in miniature on Octave’s fireplace and as a decorative element in the elegant drawing rooms where Rémi unexpectedly joins Louise for a party, as well as in the Art Déco-style café near the Place Saint Michel where she first surmises his secret double life. But the difference between Paris and the new city is not just one of temporality and authenticity. As reiterated shot compositions of Rémi’s and Louise’s bedroom with its window overlooking a building site or of characters climbing up the glass-fronted staircase connote, the new city exhibits a spirit of transparency. The absence of curtains and open views indicate a lifestyle where there is nothing to hide – precisely the kind of existence the possessive Rémi is aspiring to in his troubled relation with Louise. The young woman’s pied-à-terre, by contrast, veiled by a drape of curtains even during daytime, protects against intrusive gazes.

The interiors become a metaphor for the affective lives and aspirations of their inhabitants, diverse emotional landscapes that are as contrasted as the cities – old and new – they inhabit. In a passionate diatribe, Octave declares the *villes nouvelles* to be ‘terrifiant d’ennui’, chanting instead the myriad possibilities – cinemas, restaurants, amorous encounters with beautiful women – afforded by the capital. For this urban socialite, Paris is the uncontested centre – a city that is ‘presque le centre de l’univers’ – whereas Marne-la-Vallée – subsumed under the wider *banlieue* – is little more than a dormitory town. For Louise, likewise, as she confesses to the stranger in a café,

initially her Parisian pied-à-terre made her feel ‘au centre du monde’ whilst she considered herself ‘comme en exil’ in the new town. However, after a night with another man which makes her realize how much she loves Rémi, ‘la relation s’est inversée et l’exil est ici, le centre là-bas’. Centre and periphery, then, for Rohmer are no fixed entities or absolutes; they are above all affective categories that shift with the focus of our hearts. We are reminded of Proust’s aphorism: ‘L’amour c’est le temps et l’espace rendus sensibles au coeur.’³⁹ Yet, ironically, it is after she has understood the centrality of Rémi (and, with him, of Marne-la-Vallée) in her life, that Louise will be expelled back to the centre-turned-periphery when her partner breaks off the relationship. Paying homage to Marcel Carné’s circular fictions, the film ends exactly where it began: with a pan of the RER station as Louise progressively disappears from sight.⁴⁰ As Wolfram Nitsch points out, the myth of Paris as the only place where unexpected encounters and experiences are possible is deconstructed by the subplot of Rémi’s affair with another woman: no longer a privileged terrain for amorous adventures, the hegemony of the city centre is toppled by the dormitory town, which reveals its own capacity for emotion.⁴¹ Inversely, Louise’s need for companionship and unwillingness to transform her Paris pied-à-terre into a space of creation, Annabelle Cone explains, ‘points to her failure in developing an urban identity separate from the more domestic and confining suburban identity.’

Whilst *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* alternated between the capital and the *ville nouvelle* in a crisscrossing of settings, in *L’Ami de mon amie*, the new town of Cergy-Pontoise holds unrivalled center stage: Paris is relegated to an off-screen, nothing more than a mirage on the horizon, whose landmarks can be made out in good weather, or a destination for weekend outings. With its story of an incompatible couple and Marivaudesque swapping of partners the 1986 film in many ways appears

like a remake of its 1983 predecessor in a similar *ville nouvelle* setting, yet, three years on, the premises are changed: where Marne-la-Vallée was presented as a city in the making without infrastructures, apart from its commuter terminal and sports facilities, Cergy-Pontoise – the town whose planning and construction were the subject of *Naissance d'une ville* – is a fully fledged city with exciting employment opportunities for young professionals, a wide range of leisure and cultural activities, as well as a wealth of cafés and restaurants. In counterpoint to Octave, who scolded the nomadic Louise for burying herself in a dormitory town, the engineer Alexandre (François-Eric Gendron), in Godard-style citational tone, sings the praises of the new city: ‘évidemment avec les quinze chaînes de télévision, les lacs, les tennis, bientôt le golf, les deux théâtres, on aurait du mal à s’ennuyer ici’. No longer considered as the periphery, Cergy is presented as an integral part of the *Grand Paris* that was beginning to take shape in the late 1980s. In fact, as Alexandre suggests in a further reversal of linguistic and cultural stereotypes, one feels more integrated in the modern metropolis in Cergy than if one lived ‘au fin fond du 1^{er} arrondissement’. The hinterland has become the new centre from where the whole of France can be navigated at ease.

In the title sequence, each of the main characters is introduced by means of a landmark building – the town hall, the Informatics School, the EDF tower, a Science laboratory, the Arts School – to which they are as symbiotically linked as to their homes which we discover in due course. Far from the mid-winter dreariness of Marne-la-Vallée with its identical housing blocks and suburban wastelands, the camera scans the diverse architecture of an ambitious town-planning project that encompasses several communes plus a stunning countryside in all its summer glory. The new city of Cergy is not only pitted against Paris (images of which are reduced to

a single sequence, associated with the art student Adrienne (Anne-Laure Meury)), but more importantly, against the *banlieue*. In a highly controversial scene shot at the Étang de Cergy that sparked an irate response from Louis Skorecki at the film's release,⁴² the aptly named Blanche (Emmanuelle Chaulet) and Fabien (Eric Viellard) rub shoulders with the predominantly immigrant working-class population from the suburbs. 'Pour la plupart ici, c'est pas les gens de Cergy', comments Fabien. 'Ils viennent de banlieues moches où ils vivent dans la semaine entassés les uns sur les autres dans des HLM complètement délabrés, alors pour eux ici c'est un peu comme s'ils venaient à Versailles'. Rohmer's Cergy, in opposition, is exclusively white and middle-class, a playground for affluent young graduates. The airy, glass-fronted offices in which Blanche and Alexandre go about their responsibilities, Blanche's flat in Ricardo Bofill's Belvedere Saint-Christoph housing complex and Fabien and Alexandre's neat little houses complete with prim gardens and leafy terraces exude an air of middle-class respectability. The strictly symmetrical shot compositions, in tune with the geometrical outline of the new city, convey a sense of order and conformity. Cergy, as Alain Hertay remarks, is the disturbing embodiment of a 'clean' society 'où l'on ne voit pas un seul clochard, pas un déchet, pas une seule fausse note'.⁴³

Despite the more attractive picture he paints of the new city, Rohmer nonetheless pursues his critical interrogation about the conditions of living and the emotional experiences afforded by a new type of urbanism. In a dialogue between Leah (Sophie Renoir) and Blanche, the former – a self-confessed nomad like her counterpart Louise from *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* – qualifies Bofill's postmodernist Belvedere as a 'caserne' whilst the latter calls it a 'palais'. The sun-drenched rooms and dramatic lighting of the building at night advantageously staged in later scenes do indeed give it the appearance of a 'grand hôtel' – another of Blanche's epithets for her

home – even if, ironically, it shares the anonymity and, to a certain extent, soullessness, of a transitory accommodation. Apart from a Nicolas de Staël print, the walls of Blanche's flat are blank like her name, the impersonal white interiors a mirror image of this character without history or mystery. The promotional posters of Cergy in her office promise 'De la place pour l'Amitié', yet, during her first encounter with Leah, Blanche confesses that she has made no friends in the new town. The threatening anonymity of *ville nouvelle* living is reinforced by a shot composition where the two young women, sitting on a balustrade, are dwarfed by the imposing volumes of the buildings around them. Rohmer creates an ironic tension between urban solitude and quasi-rural conviviality through the repeated scenes where the *dramatis personae* run into each other by chance: Cergy, as Fabien remarks, is like a 'village', the problem being that one only ever meets the same people... The argument between Alexandre and his girlfriend about the location of the town's main square playfully echoes the comments an architect makes in *Naissance d'une ville* about the *ville nouvelle*'s lack of readability resulting in disorientation. Like Blanche's flat, which metonymically stands in for the new city, Cergy is a place of transit rather than a place of dwelling.

Contrary to *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* where Marne-la-Vallée was presented as a synchronic city without history, here we witness the architects' endeavour – mentioned in *La Diversité du paysage urbain* – to endow the new town with temporal references of its own. Bofill's grandiloquent architecture, first introduced in *Naissance d'une ville*, becomes a showcase for the derivative postmodern style that eclectically recycles the forms and figures of earlier periods in a self-conscious exercise of citation. Where in *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* the column motif situated Paris as a historic city, here the colonnade of the Belvedere anchors the postmodern

extravaganza in the Greco-Roman tradition whilst also alluding directly to Bernini's Saint Peter's Square. Likewise, Rohmer's own intermedial citation of Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à l'île de la Grande-Jatte* in the documentary-style sequence on the lake and, a little later, the allusion to Renoir's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (which, as Wolfram Nitsch points out, in turn alludes to the director's *Partie de campagne*⁴⁴) in the scene where Blanche and Fabian explore the countryside, create a palimpsestic layering that inscribes the filmic setting in an artistic tradition going back all the way to the Belle Epoque. As if to make sure that his allusion is not lost on spectators, the director has Blanche comment on the origin of these déjà-vu images: 'En fait, c'est plutôt un voyage dans le temps que j'ai l'impression de faire. Tu sais quand les ouvriers allaient pique-niquer au bord de la Seine ou la Marne.' The filmic citational strategy cunningly mirrors the postmodern architectural pastiche.

As Fredric Jameson and Mike Featherstone have argued, postmodernism, as a new aesthetic and philosophical paradigm that emerged in post-industrialist societies after World War II, is inseparably bound up with consumerism and late capitalism.⁴⁵ In its unashamed gesture of recycling and copying, its architectural avatar – which gave postmodernism its name – grafts itself on an existing tradition without forging a stylistic language of its own. Often considered more pleasing to the eye than the Internationalist style of modernism in opposition to which it emerged, the postmodernist recreation of palaces, temples, and other such classical structures with the cheap materials of low-cost construction that have made the reputation of an architect like Bofill is not devoid of cynicism. With hindsight, the rapid degradation of housing units such as his *Espaces d'Abraxas* in another *ville nouvelle*, Noisy-le-Grand, calls into question their creator's utopian vision for a better new city.⁴⁶ Rohmer himself acknowledges that the type of architecture he showcased in *Les Nuits*

de la pleine lune and *L'Ami de mon amie* has aged badly, shattering the hopes that were put in the *villes nouvelles*.⁴⁷ Leaving aside the integrity and durability of postmodern housing projects, but probing further the intrinsic connection between urbanism and experience, there remains the controversial question of how to evaluate the latter film's portrayal of love and life in the new city. Does the director obliquely critique the conformism of 1980s *ville nouvelle* dwellers, who aspire to nothing more than a 'bonheur fade', as surmise de Baecque and Herpe?⁴⁸ Should *L'Ami de mon amie* be read as the illustration of a narcissistic, postmodern society falsely concerned with individualism, yet, in reality, all the more normalizing in its preoccupation with appearance and promotion of a white, middle-class life style?⁴⁹ Or else, as Clerc concludes, is Cergy a Foucauldian heterotopia, a Barthesian 'neutral' space coalesced in an un-decidable film that vacillates between critiquing the effects of a certain type of urbanism on its inhabitants and endorsing their quest for harmony and happiness?⁵⁰ Rohmer himself, emblematic of his ambivalent attitude towards architectural modernity, wavers between a utopian perspective and a more critical one in an interview for *Libération*. At first the director establishes a positive link between architecture and emotion in the new city space:

Les personnages de *L'Ami de mon amie* sont ancrés dans la vie: cet urbanisme donnait une forme architecturale à leurs espérances, à leur idéal ou à leurs déceptions. Cergy sert donc de laboratoire à une expérience, d'espace utopique et concret en même temps, où la fiction et les personnages peuvent se développer sans entrave.⁵¹

Yet he quickly admits that the mediocre constructions of a new town like Cergy are reflected in his characters:

A Cergy, comme dans toute ville nouvelle sans doute, il existe une certaine médiocrité dans la réalisation des bâtiments. [...] C'est exactement la même chose pour les personnages [...]. La vie à Cergy était organisée autour d'une idée fixe: être contemporain. Avoir un métier moderne, faire du sport, être de son siècle. Il faut surtout être très optimiste, ne jamais voir la vie autrement. Cela m'amuse de montrer ça dans une fable où perçait une certaine ironie, sans agressivité.⁵²

Classique ou moderne?

When asked by Jousse and Paquot why he took an interest in the debate between modern and utopian architectures of the 1960s in both his documentary and fictional work, Rohmer answers: '[J]e veux bien être classique, mais je veux être moderne aussi, donc j'ai entrepris de montrer l'architecture de notre temps.'⁵³ The tension between classicism and modernity, as we have seen, is one that underpins his extended meditation on new architectural forms as well as his aesthetic as a filmmaker more widely.⁵⁴ In his pedagogical films, the director carried out a sustained enquiry about urban change in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and, more recently, the demographic expansion after World War II. His interrogation of the architectural transmutations of the twentieth century and their effects on city dwellers was pursued in fictional form in two of his films of the *Comédies et proverbes* cycle, that testify to what Clerc justly calls the 'porosité' between documentary and fiction in Rohmer's work.⁵⁵ Whilst showing a keen interest in the flagship projects of

architects such as Chemetov and Bofill, Rohmer's stance on modern architecture remains steeped in ambiguity. An outspoken critic of the functional modernism of Le Corbusier, which continued to dominate post-war construction, he was no less skeptical about the cheaply produced postmodern housing blocks of the 1970s and '80s, even if the postmodern aesthetic corresponded more to the human scale he considered an indispensable mark of successful architecture. His extended reflections on architecture and urbanism quickly took him beyond the simple binaries of classical versus modern, modernist versus postmodern towards a wider meditation on the relationship between the built environment and experience embedded in an intermedial confrontation between architecture and its sibling art, film. In 'Architecture d'Apocalypse' Rohmer defines classicism in architecture in terms of the importance it attaches to harmony and simplicity, and its welding of beauty and utility in response to a human need for shelter and protection.⁵⁶ Just as architecture fashions reality, he continues his reflection, so the cinema constructs its fictions with the real.⁵⁷ Architecture, then, as an art form that is an integral part of the world whilst at the same time refashioning it, sustains the director's claim for cinema's ontological status as a realist art devoted to apprehending and shaping life in all its inherent beauty.⁵⁸ At the end of the essay, wrapping up his evaluation of modern architecture through the prism of cinema, Rohmer, in a statement that reads like a manifesto of his filmic oeuvre to come, can confidently posit the interpenetration between the classical and the modern: 'Suis-je classique, suis-je moderne? Je crois (c'est bien entendu au nom de l'amateur de cinéma que je parle) qu'il n'est pas impossible de pratiquer à la fois ces deux vertus, et même de les cultiver mieux que ceux qui optent pour l'une au détriment de l'autre.'⁵⁹

¹ Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Cygne', in *Les Fleurs du mal*, ed. by Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin, rev. by Georges Blin and Claude Pichois (Paris: José Corti, 1986), 167-69 (p. 167).

² Éric Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre, suivi d'un entretien inédit avec Noël Herpe et Philippe Fauvel* (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2010). The volume contains a preface by Rohmer written in 1963 and an extended interview of 2009 in which he revisits his earlier essays on cinema and the other arts. For a discussion of how his thoughts on this subject have evolved over a period of more than fifty years see Didier Coureau, 'Petite anthologie de l'ontologie rohmérienne (Variations sur l'être de l'art, du cinéma et du monde)', in *Rohmer ou le jeu des variations*, ed. by Patrick Louguet (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2012), pp. 25-47 (27-32).

³ Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, p. 21.

⁴ For the proximity between cinema and architecture see Sergei Eisenstein's seminal article 'Montage and Architecture' (c. 1937), *Assemblage*, 10 (1989), 111-31 and Giuliana Bruno's ground-breaking trans-disciplinary books *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London: Verso, 2002) and *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). On the relation between urban space and film see, inter alia, Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* (London: Reaktion, 2002), *Cities in Transition: the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, ed. by Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (London: Wallflower, 2007), and Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan, *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁵ Transposed into a rural context, his views on modern architecture were equally embedded into the polemical, ecologist *L'Arbre, le maire et la médiathèque* (1993) and shine through in the dialogues on industrial architecture in *Conte d'automne* (1997).

⁶ Ivone Margulies, 'The Changing Landscape and Rohmer's Temptation of Architecture', in *The Films of Eric Rohmer. French New Wave to Old Master*, ed. by Leah Anderst (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 161-75.

⁷ Alain Hertay, *Éric Rohmer. Comédies et proverbes* (Liège: Éditions du CÉFAL, 1998), pp. 61-71 and 87-98; Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and The European Road Movie* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2006), chapter 2: 'Holidays, Relocation and Movement in the Films of Éric Rohmer'; Keith Tester, *Eric Rohmer. Film as Theology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), *passim*.

⁸ Annabelle Cone, 'Misplaced Desire: The Female and Urban Experience in Colette and Rohmer', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 24-4 (1996), 423-31.

⁹ Wolfram Nitsch analyses the representation of urban space in *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* and *L'Ami de mon amie* drawing on Marc Augé's concepts of 'non-lieux' and 'surmodernité' and on Baudelaire's notion of the 'flâneur' ('Liebe und Zufall in der Megalopole: Städtische Räume in Rohmers *Comédies et proverbes*, in *Rohmer intermedial*, ed. by Uta Felten and Volker Roloff (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2001), pp. 161-72). Thomas Clerc, in an excellent article, focuses on the portrayal of the city in Rohmer's films with special emphasis on the theoretical reflection on modernist and postmodern architecture that emerges in the television series on the *villes nouvelles* ('Rohmer l'urbain', in *Rohmer en perspectives*, ed. by Sylvie Robic and Laurence Schifano (Paris: Presses Paris Ouest, 2013), pp. 95-111 (p. 95)). See also Françoise

Puaux's informative survey on Rohmer and the city in *La Ville au cinéma*, ed. by Thierry Jousse and Thierry Paquot (Paris: *Cahiers du cinéma*, 2005), pp. 789-93 and the stimulating discussions of Rohmer and architecture in Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, *Éric Rohmer* (Paris: Stock, 2014), pp. 341-56.

¹⁰ Claude Beylie and Alain Carbonnier, 'Le Celluloïde et la pierre: Entretien avec Eric Rohmer', *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma*, 336 (1985), 4-10; Thierry Jousse and Thierry Paquot, 'Un cinéaste dans la ville: Entretien avec Éric Rohmer', in *La Ville au cinéma*, ed. by Jousse and Paquot, p. 21. See also an interview with the architect Michel Jaouën who collaborated with Rohmer on *L'Arbre, le maire et la médiathèque*: Vincent Guigueno, 'Entretien avec Michel Jaouën. "Les Villes ne sont pas des décors"', in *Rohmer et les autres*, ed. by Noël Herpe (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007), pp. 219-23.

¹¹ Éric Rohmer, *Le Laboratoire d'Éric Rohmer: un cinéaste à la télévision scolaire* (CNDP - Chasseneuil-du-Poitou, 2012) [on DVD].

¹² Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, p. 8. On Rohmer's reflections on cinema and the other arts see also Derek Schilling, *Éric Rohmer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 70-4 and Coureau, 'Petite anthologie de l'ontologie rohmérienne', pp. 27-32.

¹³ DVD *Le Laboratoire d'Éric Rohmer*, accompanying booklet, 'Fiches pédagogiques des films réalisés pour la télévision scolaire', p. 43.

¹⁴ Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, pp. 52-54.

¹⁵ 'Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo', in Alexandre Astruc, *Du stylo à la caméra... et de la caméra au stylo. Ecrits (1942-1984)* (Paris: l'Archipel, 1992), pp. 324-28.

¹⁶ For a coruscating reading of the synthesis between nature and art, ‘natural’ environment and constructed reality effected in the film see Margulies, ‘The Changing Landscape’.

¹⁷ ‘Fiches pédagogiques’, p. 44.

¹⁸ ‘Si Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c’est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur en donnant un autre que l’artiste les recrée’ (Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié, Paris, Gallimard, ‘Pléiade’, 1987-89, 4 vols, II, 191.

¹⁹ Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, p. 53.

²⁰ Cf. also Clerc, ‘Rohmer l’urbain’, pp. 96-97. For an account of the Bechers’s aesthetic see the article ‘1968a’ in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 521-26.

²¹ ‘Fiches pédagogiques’, pp. 44 and 47.

²² Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, pp. 70 and 153.

²³ The rare commentators of the film are divided between considering the whole of the film as ironic (Cyril Béghin, ‘Métamorphoses du paysage (1964): Usage pédagogique de l’ironie’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 588 (2004), 18) or, on the contrary, taking the voice-over at face value (cf. Piaux, ‘Éric Rohmer’: ‘Cette croyance naïve en un monde nouveau, à quarante ans de distance, fait sourire’ (p. 790)). In reality, the film is subtly traversed by irony, culminating in the clash between sound and image tracks in the last sequence that questions the functionalist architecture of the future.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L’Image-Temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), pp. 126-55.

²⁵ ‘Fiches pédagogiques’, p. 48.

²⁶ In preparation for the film, Rivette made a 30-minute short whose title *Paris s'en va* echoes Baudelaire's famous 'Le Vieux Paris n'est plus' from 'Le Cygne'.

²⁷ Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, p. 163.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁹ See his interview with Herpe and Fauvel in Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, pp. 156-57.

³⁰ Cited in de Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 342.

³¹ On these projects see de Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, pp. 343-44.

³² De Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 345.

³³ Clerc, 'Rohmer l'urbain', p. 98.

³⁴ See Mazierska and Rascaroli, *Crossing New Europe*, p. 55.

³⁵ It is noteworthy that Rohmer cites Akerman as one of the young talents of contemporary cinema in a letter to Gilles Jacob. See de Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 470.

³⁶ Interview with Beylie and Carbonnier, p. 7.

³⁷ On interior spaces see also Nitsch, 'Liebe und Zufall in der Megalopole', pp. 166-67. The author opposes the convivial culture of conversation embodied by Octave with the private culture of leisure embodied by Rémi. Clerc makes a similar point when contrasting the 'espace du premier degré, de l'immédiateté' of Marne-la-Vallée with the 'espace du second degré, de la distance critique' of Paris ('Rohmer l'urbain', p. 109).

³⁸ For more detail see de Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 351.

³⁹ *À la recherche du temps perdu*, III, 887.

⁴⁰ On Rohmer's indebtedness to Carné in the *Comédies et proverbes* cycle see his interview with Beylie and Carbonnier, 'Le Celluloïd et la pierre', p. 9.

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- ⁴¹ Nitsch, 'Liebe und Zufall in der Megalopole', p. 167.
- ⁴² On the polemic surrounding Rohmer's portrayal of an exclusively white, middle-class Cergy see de Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, pp. 367-69.
- ⁴³ Hertay, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 96.
- ⁴⁴ Nitsch, 'Liebe und Zufall in der Megalopole', pp. 169-70.
- ⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 1990).
- ⁴⁶ See Ricardo Bofill, 'Je n'ai pas réussi à changer la ville' and Elvire Camus, 'En Seine-Saint-Denis les illusions perdues d'une utopie urbaine', both in *Le Monde*, 8 February 2014.
- ⁴⁷ Jousse and Paquot, 'Un cinéaste dans la ville', p. 21.
- ⁴⁸ De Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 356.
- ⁴⁹ See Hertay, *Éric Rohmer*, pp. 91-98.
- ⁵⁰ Clerc, 'Rohmer l'urbain', p. 111.
- ⁵¹ Antoine de Baecque, interview with Éric Rohmer, *Libération*, 29 March 2002, cit. in de Baecque and Herpe, *Éric Rohmer*, p. 353.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 355-56.
- ⁵³ Jousse and Paquot, 'Un cinéaste dans la ville', p. 21.
- ⁵⁴ On the necessary relation between classicism and modernity in Rohmer's thought see Coureau, 'Petite anthologie de l'ontologie rohmérienne', pp. 32-36.
- ⁵⁵ Clerc, 'Rohmer l'urbain', p. 103.
- ⁵⁶ Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, p. 70.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵⁸ Cf. Margulies's comments on the role of architecture and landscape in Rohmer's formulation of cinema's ontological status in 'The Changing Landscape', p. 163.

⁵⁹ Rohmer, *Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, p. 80.